

## Legal Environment

Lithuania's constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, and those protections are respected by the government. In July 2014, the parliament adopted amendments to the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public that provide greater protections for journalists' sources, limiting the power of the government to pursue disclosure. Lithuanian law prohibits some categories of speech, including incitement to hatred and denial of Soviet or Nazi crimes. Online hate speech aimed at Jews and Roma has reportedly proliferated in recent years. According to the European Journalism Centre, inaction by law enforcement agencies has left local nongovernmental organizations—specifically the Tolerant Youth Association—with the task of referring online hate speech to officials, who have prosecuted a number of cases.

In March 2014, on the basis of the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public, Lithuanian authorities suspended retransmissions of some programming by the Russian-language television channel NTV Mir for three months. The suspension was based on findings by the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (LRTK) that a historical film aired by NTV Mir about the Soviet army in Lithuania contained untruthful and offensive content. Similarly, in April, the LRTK suspended rebroadcasting of some programs by the Russian-language RTR Planeta for three months. The commission found that the outlet's coverage of the Ukraine crisis contained biased and tendentious information that justified violence and military aggression. In December, the president of Croatia proposed amendments to the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public that would hold broadcasters liable for transmitting "war propaganda" or information deemed to be harmful to national security, penalizing the offense by a fine of up to 3 percent of an outlet's annual income. The bill remained under consideration at year's end.

Defamation is punishable by fines or imprisonment. While it is more common for lawmakers and business leaders to pursue cases against individuals who make allegedly defamatory statements than the news outlets that report them, journalists are sometimes affected. In 2011, journalist Gintaras Visockas was convicted of libel and fined \$12,400 for an article in which he suggested that a former presidential candidate was controlled by the state security service during the Soviet period.

A freedom of information law obliges the government to help citizens access public documents, and authorities generally provide access. The law was amended in 2012 to improve assistance for those requesting information. In the first eight months of 2014, there were 32 reported complaints of information request delays; the parliamentary ombudsman, who handles complaints about freedom of information, investigated 24 of the reports and found 16 to be valid, recommending that disciplinary measures be taken.

The LRTK is authorized to handle licensing and regulation of private broadcasters, while the Council for Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRTT) handles the same issues for the public broadcaster, Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT). Both regulators are perceived to be generally independent from the government or political interests. Self-regulatory bodies oversee print and online media.

## Political Environment

The country's media freely criticize the government and express a wide variety of views. In the run-up to presidential election held in Lithuania in May 2014, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) noted a diversity of opinions in the country's media environment and found that adequate regulations were in place for the coverage of presidential candidates and campaigns.

Journalists have faced retaliatory pressure from authorities for publishing state information. In June 2014, Lithuanian authorities revealed that the Special Investigative Service (SIS) had wiretapped the phones of several employees of the Baltic News Service (BNS). The disclosure followed a December 2013 court order to reveal methods used by the SIS to investigate the sources of a controversial BNS story that had cited leaked intelligence information. In August 2014, the Vilnius Regional Court found the surveillance by the SIS to be illegal.

There were no reports of attacks against journalists in 2014.

## **Economic Environment**

LRT operates three national television channels, three national radio channels, and an online portal. In addition to the public broadcast outlets, dozens of independent television and radio stations are available, including the main commercial television stations LNK, TV3, and BTV. More than 300 privately owned newspapers publish in Lithuanian, Russian, and a few other languages. Online outlets have gained popularity as sources of news and information. Approximately 72 percent of individuals accessed the internet in 2014.

Media ownership remains concentrated, with a small number of firms—both domestic and foreign—owning the majority of the market. Ownership is not transparent, as disclosure is not strictly mandated or enforced. Banks are barred by law from owning media outlets, but many institutions work around the restriction by maintaining media holdings through intermediaries. Newspapers controlled by financial institutions demonstrate bias in favor of their owners. Amendments designed to keep banks from indirectly purchasing shares of media outlets were introduced in the parliament in 2011, but have not been passed. Several politicians maintain ownership stakes in major news outlets, some of which demonstrate related biases; political parties are prohibited from owning news media.

The country's advertising market experienced a steep decline in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, but has shown signs of recovery. The government is one of the largest advertisers. A U.S. diplomatic cable released by the antisecrecy organization WikiLeaks in 2011 revealed information on the extent of corruption in media advertising in Lithuania. Major newspapers such as *Respublika* and *Lietuvos Rytas* had allegedly threatened politicians with negative coverage to obtain advertising revenue, according to the document. The cable also indicated the ease with which politicians have traditionally been able to buy positive press coverage.